

Horsing around at Hudson Valley equine sanctuaries

These rescues give visitors the opportunity to interact with horses — and reap the physical and psychological benefits



Otsego County Deputy Sheriff Erika Puffer leads Paul Bunyan during training on how to investigate equine cruelty and neglect cases on June 13, 2019, at Little Brook Farm in Chatham. Phoebe Sheehan/Times Union

As a local choir sang near a paddock in Valatie on a recent sunny Saturday, a rescue horse named Nemo ambled closer to listen to the music, his head cocked to one side.

That was exactly the point. The seven-woman ensemble, Wolcum (“welcome” in Middle English), was performing at Equine Advocates’ not just for the human visitors but also for the enjoyment of the [84 rescue equines](#) and two rescue goats that live on the sanctuary’s 173 acres. As the group sang, a message came across loud and clear: Horses (and goats) have feelings, too.

Equine Advocates is one of many nonprofit horse rescues in the Hudson Valley that offer visitors hands-on experience. [Studies](#) have shown that contact with horses, along with simply being out in nature, improves people’s physical and psychological wellbeing by reducing stress and regulating heart rate. Some of the rescues also adopt out horses, although those at Equine Advocates are all permanent residents.

The horses come to the rescues in a variety of ways, including from owners who can no longer care for them and via law enforcement seizures in neglect, cruelty and abandonment cases. Equine Advocates and Little Brook Farm in Old Chatham buy horses from Amish farmers that would otherwise be destined for slaughter.

“I’m getting emails or calls about horses every single day right now,” said Lynn Cross, owner of Little Brook Farm. “Amish owners will often call me if they’re getting ready to sell a horse at auction to see if I will buy it.”

according to Equine Advocates, but when a horse needs vet care, the bill can easily run into five figures.

Most of the rescues rely on volunteers to help care for the horses and say they can always use more. Some welcome drop-in visitors, making it easy to fit horse face time into a busy schedule.

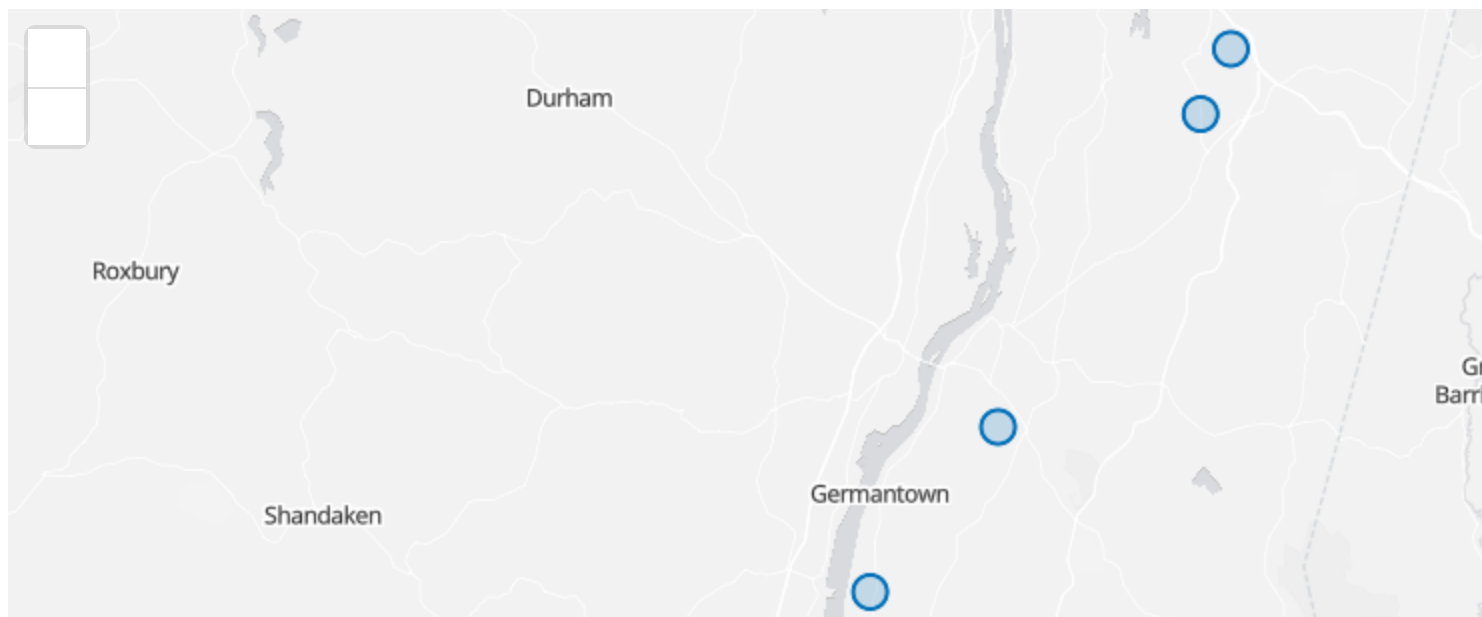
In addition to applying for private grants, the rescues host events and offer programs like summer camps to raise funds and awareness of rescue horses' plight.

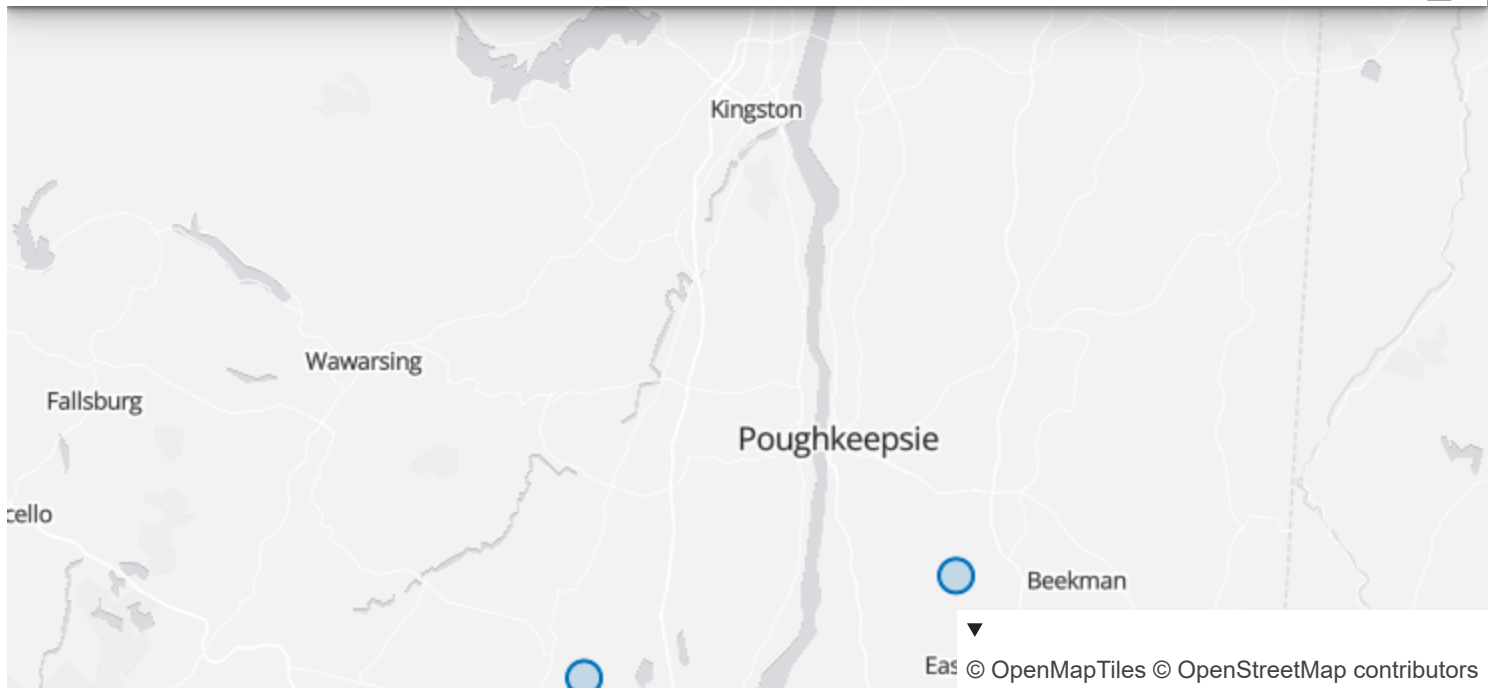
More than 300 visitors attended Equine Advocates' Sept. 13 "open day," a record number for the sanctuary, which hosts an open day monthly from May through November. The final two of the season are scheduled for Oct. 18 and Nov. 9.

Use filters to narrow your choices.

+ Adoption + Lessons + Therapy

Showing 6 of 6





Equine Advocates

[READ MORE](#)

Little Brook Farm

[READ MORE](#)

Tomorrow's Sanctuary Center

[READ MORE](#)

<https://s.hdnux.com/photos/0/0/0/28485276/1/175x0.jpg>

Equine Advocates

3212 state Route 66, Valatie [SEE ON MAP](#)

Susan Wagner rescued her first horse when she was living in Queens and working at the [Wildlife Conservation Society](#). After a horse at the society's children's zoo tried to bite several children and "was going to be sold for meat," Wagner arranged for him to live on a farm in Maryland.

By 2004, when she opened her sanctuary in Valatie, Wagner had placed around 25 rescue horses at barns across the northeast under the aegis of a

earlier. All those horses moved to the sanctuary.

“I felt there needed to be an organization to oppose horse slaughter and that the only way to rescue horses from slaughter would be to start a nonprofit,” Wagner said.

Wagner also strongly opposes the [Bureau of Land Management](#)’s round-ups and auctions of mustangs and wild burros, and has brought four mustangs and four wild burros to live at the sanctuary.

“They’re destroying the viability of the herd at this rate, and these animals will become extinct,” she said. “Most wild horses don’t make it in captivity.”

There are also five equine military veterans living at the sanctuary, including [Sergeant York](#), a 34-year-old black standardbred gelding who gained fame as the riderless horse at President Ronald Reagan’s funeral procession in 2004.

The sanctuary has a successful equine-sponsorship program with a minimum of \$50 per month, and some equines, like a particularly popular burro named [Pensacola Pete](#), have multiple sponsors.

None of the animals are available for adoption.

“Once they’re here, they have their families, they have their herds, and I don’t want to separate them,” Wagner said.

Phoebe Sheehan/Times Union

Little Brook Farm

548 county Road 13, Old Chatham [SEE ON MAP](#)

Founded in 1977, Little Brook Farm is one of the oldest horse sanctuaries in the country, according to owner Lynn Cross.

Right out of college, Cross started working with the director of a local human society who would take her to evaluate neglect and cruelty complaints involving horses.

“It influenced me tremendously,” Cross said. “I would never sell a horse because I saw too much too young.”

1989 and added about 42 acres in 1999. She established the nonprofit in 1986. Nearby landowners allow her to use an additional 160 acres. The rescue cares for 82 equines, including 39 in nearby foster homes, with the help of 20 weekly volunteers. A spotted mule and six donkeys round out the group.

Little Brook Farm used to adopt out horses but stopped because there's so much work involved in finding the right placement. "I don't have the steam to do it anymore," Cross said.

The nonprofit arm, called B.I.T.S. (Balanced Innovative Teaching Strategies, Inc.), brings students from nursery school through college and adult education classes to the farm to learn about horses and horsemanship. Special-needs children and adults come for equine therapy.

LESSONS THERAPY

PHONE: 518-821-5506 **WEBSITE**

ADVERTISEMENT

Karen Angel/For the Times Union

Tomorrow Tomorrow Sanctuary & Healing Center

50 Prilipper Road, Hudson [SEE ON MAP](#)

Michael Bucci says he realized that working with kids and animals would make him happy when he was a 20-year-old electrician helping wire a hospital construction site and a raccoon snuck on the site.

“Kids used to come out and see me in their wheelchairs and gurneys and canes,” said Bucci, 79. “The kids and I were feeding the raccoon, and I

great life if I did.”

Twenty-seven years ago, Bucci’s wish became a reality when he sold his Westchester towing business and bought 150 acres in Hudson to help children spend time with animals. He formed the nonprofit in 2006. The sanctuary has placed more than 100 horses in homes over the last 10 years, according to Bucci.

Tomorrow Tomorrow is currently home to nine horses — mostly retired racehorses — 12 goats, five cats, three dogs and several roosters that “like to raise hell,” Bucci said.

For a donation of any amount, visitors can groom and pet [the horses](#) and [walk the trails on the property](#) accompanied by goats while learning about the flora and fauna in the surrounding woods.

ADOPTION THERAPY

PHONE: 518-929-6092 **[WEBSITE](#)**

Courtesy of Pony Up Rescue Collective

Pony Up Rescue Collective

45 Stonybrook Road, Tivoli [SEE ON MAP](#)

Three years ago, horse trainer Kelsey Merrow rescued her first equine, a blind pony she named Potato.

“I discovered it takes a village to rehabilitate a pony and make a pony adoptable, and I wanted to build that village,” she said.

of volunteers on a 26-acre farm that she leases in Tivoli. She formed the nonprofit rescue the next year.

Pony Up now has 65 volunteers between the ages of 12 and 85 helping rehabilitate neglected and abused ponies to make them adoptable.

“Most people who want to be around horses have to go to the county fair petting zoo,” Merrow said. “I wanted to make horses available to everyone. The only prerequisite for being at this rescue is good will.”

The rescue currently houses eight equines — including a baby mule that one of its residents gave birth to — has saved a total of 17 and has rehomed nine. Several organizations that serve autistic youth and special-needs adults regularly bring clients to the rescue to interact with the ponies and help socialize them.

“They’re doing just as much for the horses as the horses are doing for them,” Merrow said.

Merrow offers tours of the farm at noon on the first and third Saturday of each month.

ADOPTION THERAPY

PHONE: 917-660-2647 **WEBSITE**

Karen Angel/For the Times Union

Hi Hopes Thoroughbred Rescue

187 Robinson Lane, Wappingers Falls [SEE ON MAP](#)

Shawna Anderson was running a rescue at her longtime lesson barn, [Southern Dutchess Equestrian Center](#), even before she officially founded one.

“My bookkeeper said, ‘You take in so many horses that aren’t rideable, I think you should become a rescue,’” Anderson said. “So she started the paperwork.”

help the breed that had always been her first love. She now has nine rescues, mostly retired racehorses or injured thoroughbreds, living on her 35-acre farm, five in a field she rents in LaGrange and one at a nearby foster home.

“People can stop in and see the horses anytime, as long as it’s not at midnight,” Anderson said.

She does most of the work for the rescue herself and says more volunteers would be helpful. “It would be nice to get people who know how to muck stalls and handle horses, but what I find is that everyone who wants to volunteer just wants to play with the horses,” she said. “They want to do the fun stuff.”

Anderson runs an annual [Easter egg hunt](#) that typically draws more than 100 attendees, [a summer camp](#) and a fall camp for homeschooled kids.

ADOPTION LESSONS

PHONE: 845-656-5365 **[WEBSITE](#)**

Karen Angel/For the Times Union

Saddle Brook Farm Animal Rescue

163 Berea Road, Walden [SEE ON MAP](#)

For Helen King, the 55 rescue horses who got to live on her farm until the end of their lives symbolize the biggest reward of running a sanctuary.

they can possibly have till the end,” said King, the owner of Saddle Brook Farm Animal Rescue in Walden.

King bought the 22-acre farm in 2006 and formed the nonprofit rescue in 2014. “There was a huge, massive need for it,” she said.

The eclectic farm currently houses 11 rescue horses as well as some cows, steers, goats, alpacas, rabbits, dogs, cats, ducks and chickens, one sheep and an emu named Hey Girl.

The farm hosts a summer horsemanship program for kids and [two horse-show benefits a year](#) with food and craft vendors.

ADOPTION LESSONS

PHONE: 914-804-0958 **[WEBSITE](#)**

TU Let us be your guide each week to the area’s natural world

Enter your email address here.

SIGN UP

This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#) By subscribing, you agree to our [Terms of Use](#) and acknowledge that your information will be used as described in our [Privacy Notice](#).

Credits

Reporting by Karen Angel. Editing by [Phillip Pantuso](#). Production by Cat Syman.
Powered by the [Hearst Newspapers DevHub](#). [↗](#)

Read More

retired thoroughbreds

police force

Italian Art



TOP

ABOUT

- Our Company
- General Standards and Practices
- Newspaper Delivery Safety Procedures
- Advertising
- Terms of Use
- Privacy Notice
- DAA Industry Opt Out
- Jobs at the Times Union

CONTACT

- Contact Us
- Our Use of AI
- Standards and Practices

SERVICES

- Subscriber Services
- Subscribe
- Become a Carrier
- e-Edition
- Mobile App
- Copyright and Reprint
- Archives

Your Privacy Choices (Opt Out of Sale/Targeted Ads)